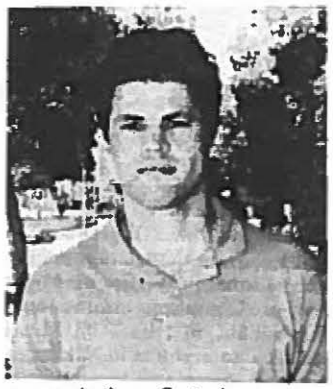
Exploring Hawaiian Sovereignty: "The Legacy of Captain Cook"

By Anthony Castanha

Writer's Note: This article is a continuation of our series on Hawaiian Sovereignty. With 1993 marking the 100th anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, HPP is examining and providing its readers with some background into this issue. Our first story concerned pieces of ancient Hawaiian history prior to the arrival of Captain Cook.



Anthony Castanha

The coming of the white man to Hawaii seemed an inevitable episode of the period. This event would have a tremendous impact on the era and the future of the islands, on both the white man and the native Hawaiian. Whether for good or evil, it changed the face of Hawaii forever.

Though British Captain James Cook is generally credited as the sole discoverer of the islands, Hawaiian tradition gives evidence that other vessels, of European origin, may have arrived before him. In *The Napolean of the Pacific: Kamehameha The Great*, Hebert H. Gowen quotes, "So David Malo tells us in his history and Fornander calculates that the event took place somewhere between 1525 and 1528. From foreign sources we have evidence that the ship belonged to a small Spanish squadron, commanded by Saavedra, which was on its way to the Moluccas," and he also notes, "But a few years later, in 1555, there is very good evidence that a Spanish sailor, Juan Gaetano, sailing in the same course as Saavedra, really discovered the group. This is supported by the archives of the Colonial Office of Spain" (55-56).

In any case, Cook, well funded by the British, surely broke the barrier of Hawaiian seclusion, though his discovery came at a late stage in exploration. Magellan, Drake, Legaspi, Mendana, Villalobos, Tasman, and others had already combed the realm of the Pacific. The Manila galleon had for more than two centuries navigated the open seas between the Philippines and Mexico, yet its customary route ran to the north and south of Hawaii. Moreover, Cook was pursuing the Strait of Anian, that did not exist; a passage through North America which would shorten travel from Europe to Asia, when he stumbled onto the Hawaiian chain (Kuykendall and Day 13).

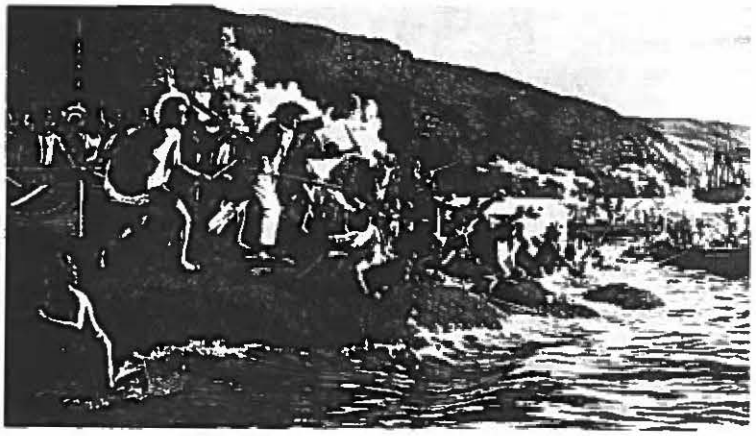
Captain James Cook was on his third voyage, in command of the (Tahiti), then to sail northeast to the coast of America in search of the mythical northern passage (Kuykendall and Day 14). Cook departed from Borabora, Tahiti on December 8, 1777, after nearly two years' exploring the region. He discovered Christmas Island on December 25, which he embarked from on January 2, 1778. On January 18, he sighted what proved to be Oahu and shortly afterward spotted another member of the group, Kauai. It is off its shores that he first set anchor (Gowen 57).

The initial encounter between haole (foreigner) and native Hawaiian occured the next day off the village of Waimea on Kauai. As they were met by an array of canoes, Cook's own words describe the scene: "They had from three to six men each; and, on their approach, we were agreeably surprised to find that they spoke the language of Otaheite and of the other islands we had lately visited. It required but very little address to get them to come alongside; but no entreaties could prevail upon any of them to come on board. I tied some brass medals to a rope and gave them to those in one of the canoes, who, in return, tied some small mackerel to the rope, as an equivalent. This was repeated; and some small nails, or bits of iron, which they valued more than any other article, were given them. For these they exchanged more fish and a sweet potato, a sure sign that they had some notion of bartering or, at least, of returning one present for another" (Kuykendall and Day 14).

It is likely that the latter of Cook's primary assessment of trade with native Hawaiians is more accurately described. Although from a Western perspective "Bartering" is the probable concept imagined, this could hardly be the correct term to analyze the actions of a people who had lived in isolation since the migration period (approximately the 12th century). Even among themselves the concept of trade was communal in nature. As anthropologist Stanly Diamond argues, "First, the *economics* of indigenous societies are generally 'communal'-that is, 'those material means essential to the survival of the individual or the group are either actively held in common or, what is equivalent, constitute readily accessible goods'" (Trask/Commission 715).

Cook and his crew went ashore three times at Waimea and were enthusiastically received. They thought it was strange how the maka'ainana (commoners), and even the ali'i (chiefs), had shown such great respect and awe for Captain Cook. The people were just as responsive when Cook landed at nearby Niihau (Commission 150). The two ships remained there for a short while before sailing to the northwest coast of America, bypassing the islands to the southeast. Nevertheless, Cook christened his discovery the *Sandwich Islands*, "in honor of his friend and patron the Earl of Sandwich, then First Lord of the British Admiralty," before departing (Kuykendall and Day 16).

After eight months of a frustrating and unsuccessful voyage, Cook



The death of Captain James Cook at Kealakekua Bay on February 14, 1779. "A most miserable scene of confusion," wrote one observer. Artist Herb Kane researched the weapons, uniforms, ships, and eyewitness accounts in Hawaii and England for this painting. Printed in *National Geographic Magazine* Nov., 1983. Collection of Nick G. Maggos

November 26. He visited Maui and the island of Hawaii, exchanging gifts with the Mo'i (supreme ali'i or king) of each island (Commission 151). Both of these leaders, Kahekili of Maui and Lanaiopuu of Hawaii, were at war with each other (Kuykendall and Day 16).

It was during this time that Cook realized the logic regarding the special treatment given him. He had again arrived during the months of the makahiki festival (ancient festival with sports and religious festivities and taboo on war). Many people had already believed Captain Cook to be Lono, the god of agriculture and the

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makahiki harvest. They must have further considered it more than coincidental that Cook's banner "consisted of a tall pole and cross bar . . . decorated with large sheets of white kapa (or cloth)." This is the symbol for Lono (Commission 151).

One day a number of ali'i visited the *Resolution* off Hawaii, and some spent the night aboard the ship. One of these ali'i was Kamehameha whose, as Kuykendall and Day express, "intelligent curiosity about the ways of white men in war and peace was to help him pull together in the islands a kingdom that would endure for more than a century despite foreign encroachments" (16-17). It is somewhat ironic that this informal meeting between two of the most influential figures in recent Hawaiian history is not even cited by Cook in his journal (Kuykendall and Day 17).

Cook landed at Kealakekua Bay on the Kona coast of Hawaii on January 17, 1779. The next two weeks or so were spent preparing for the ships return to the Arctic and gathering additional information about the Hawaiian people. On January 25, Cook and King Kalaniopuu again visited exchanging names and gifts. The King presented Cook with several feather cloaks and received a linen shirt, a sword, and a "complete tool chest" in return. Cook and his crew finally dparted the Kona coast on February 4, but a severe storm off the coast of Kohala damaged the foremast of the *Resolution*, forcing them to return to Kealakekua (Kuykendall and Kay 17).

Up until this point, a few altercations had inevitably occured between Cook's men and the Hawaiians, including the senseless shooting of a Hawaiian who "attempted to grab a boat hook." Despite these incidents, both sides had kept relations amicable and seemed sincere in trying to resolve any discord between them. On the afternoon of the 13th, tension once more broke out between the two parties. As a result, the large cutter of the *Discovery* was stolen that night. The next morning Cook, along with three small boats and a marine guard, went ashore determined to get the cutter back. "His plan," as told by Kuykendall and Day, "one that had always worked before in his dealings with Pacific Islanders, was to take King Kalaniopuu on board the flagship and hold him as hostage for the stolen boat" (18).

Kalaniopuu was willing to accompany Cook but the king's wife, Kanekapolei, and two high ali'i, were skeptical and upset at the apparent hostile conduct of Lono, refusing to allow the king's abduction (Gowen 96). Cook retreated in his attempt to take Kalaniopuu and on the rocks near the shore a fight broke out between Cook and the Hawaiians. in the ensuing battle, Cook was struck down and stabbed in the back with one of his own daggers. According to a native Hawaiian story, one ali'i had, "seized Captain Cook with a strong hand, designing merely to hold him, and not to take his life; for he supposed him to be a god, and that he could not die. Captain Cook struggled to free himself from the grasp, and as he was about to fall uttered a groan. The people immediately exclaimed, "He goans—he is not a god,' and instantly slew him" (Kuykendall and Day 18).

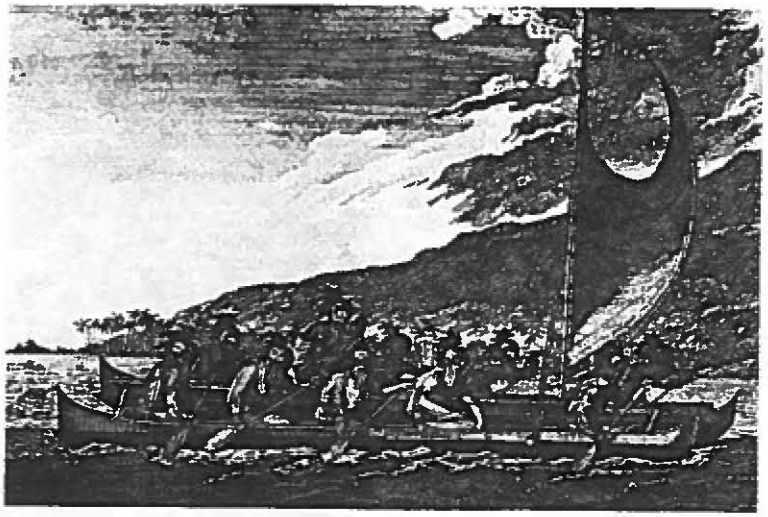
The events leading to the death of Captain cook seemed an inevitable consequence of fate with surely both sides to blame; it was certainly a symbolic outcome to the Hawaiian people. Cook's death would now signify the beginning of death and depopulation for native Hawaiians. Cook brought with him to the islands more than precious iron. He also brought disease. The *Native Hawaiians Study Commission* asserts, "In January, 1778, the arrival of the first foreigners, Captain Cook and his seamen, brought medical disaster in the form of the venereal diseases, mainly gonorrhea and syphilis, tuberculosis, other common contagious bacterial viral illnesses, as well as alcohol, gunfire, and other forms of disrespect for the kapu (sacred law), the gods, and nature" (102). Dr. Haunani-Kay Trask also states, "Scholars of Hawaiian history have recorded how Western contact (and American predominance after 1810) resulted in economic chaos, spiritual devastation, and physical death to native Hawaiians. Within forty years after contact, introduced diseases had reduced the indigenous population by more than half, from 400,000 to 140,000" (Commission 713).

Captain Cook was clearly aware of the ramifications of the spread of diseases as he himself said, "that I might do everything in my power to prevent the importation of a fatal disease into this island, which I knew some of our men laboured under, and which unfortunately had been already communicated by us to other islands in these seas. With the same view, I ordered all female visitors to be excluded from the ships . . ." (Gowen 59-60).

Cook definitely didn't do everything in his power to prevent this. Moreover, Hawaiian tradition indicates that while anchored off Waimea, lelemahoalani, daughter of high ali'i Kamakahalei, was the guest of Cook aboard his ship (Gowen 60). Fornander however tells how we need not rely upon native testimony to see the tragic sequel that Cook's orders were not enforced. The result he adds, of "death and indescribable misery for the poor Hawaiians. No wonder that the memory of Captain Cook is not cherished among them" (Gowen 60).

Captain Cook was undoubtedly one of the great navigators of his time, but his legacy among native Hawaiians is well reiterated by Fornander above. The introduction of Western disease to Hawaii my have been an unfortunate result of history. Still, it cannot be "written off." Until today, responsible governments have yet to acknowledge, and even deny, these injustices caused to native Hawaiian people.

To be continued . . .



This small double canoe with sail is believed to be accurately drawn by Webber, an artist who accompanied Captain Cook, as they first approached the islands in 1778. Bishop Museum Press

Prefectural cultural assets designated

The government's Cultural Properties Preservation Council recommended that three Okinawan monuments warrant designation as important national properties on May 29. They are Chunnagar in Ginowan, the Tomiyahaka in Hirara on Miyako, and the tatami stones in Nakazato on Ojima. A report will be submitted to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Chunnagar is a natural spring enclosed within masonry and consisting of a larger well for the use of men and a smaller one for women. The stonework was constructed at the beginning of the 19th century. It lies within Futenma's U.S. military base.

Tomiyahaka is a giant stone tomb built on a slope and containing the bodies of Nakasone Tomiya, a feudal lord of Miyako, his wife and sons, who were interred during the 15th and 16th centureis.

Ojima's tatami stones, so named after their resemblance to straw mattresses, are a natural, but beautiful, phenomenon. It is thought that they took shape after volcanic lava erupted and cooled about 5 million years ago. These symmetrically shaped stones extend approximately 250 meters along a beach on Ojima. (May 30, a.m. ed.)